ERIC Document Resume	See Instruction Sheet	DATE OF RESUME	DATE RECEIVED

A. PUBLICATION DATA

1. ERIC NUMBER	2. ORIGINATOR CONTROL NO(S).	3. IDENTIFICATION NO.	DO NOT WRITE IN SPACE BELOW
ED001059	N.A.	N.A.	

4. AUTHOR(S):
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5. TITLE OF DOCUMENT ABSTRACTED:
The Uniqueness of Family Life Education With Low-Income People

6. PUBLICATION TITLE:
N.A.

7. EDITOR(S):
N.A.

8. PLACE OF ORIGIN
ORG: Services to Individuals and Families
ST. Mobilization for Youth, Inc.
CITY, STATE New York, NY
TELE.
INST/LOC CODE

9. PUBLISHER OR SOURCE
Fourth Annual Leadership Inst. in Fam. Life Edu., Nassau County Mental Health Assoc.

10. VOL.	11. PAGES	12. MO./YR.	13. TOTAL PP.
N.A.	N.A.	Jan. 65	10

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TYPE OF REPORT
PROPOSAL ☐
IN-PROGRESS ☐
FINAL ☐
FOLLOW-UP ☐

OTHER ERIC REFERENCES:

ERIC SATELLITE CODE

B. INDEXING DATA

14. SUBJECT AREA

15. TYPE OF ENDEAVOR
report

16. INDEXING TERMS (6-12)

parent edu.	poverty	action projects	Mobilization for Youth, Inc.
school-home coop.	low-income people	community services	Family Life Edu. - Nassau County Mental Health Association
community relas.	social workers	fam. life education	
		culturally disadvantaged	

17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS)

Adequate education experience is important because education is the key to social techniques. They must concentrate on bare economic survival and view their problems as external. The poor should be reached with immediate concrete action. This may be considered the first step in the family life educational process in terms of engaging the poor. Several specific programs are described which attempt to give the slum dweller a means of coping with the complexities of his life.

The Parent Education Aide Program helps make home conditions more conducive to school achievement, facilitates parent-teacher interaction, and may assist mass efforts to protest school conditions. The parent aides are indigenous non-professionals, usually from the neighborhood, who can communicate more easily and serve as effective role models for other residents. The Visiting Homemakers Service teaches mothers increased competence in home management. In the School Community Relations Program social workers try to minimize the social distance between the school and the family. The client is given information about resources and is helped to articulate his needs and rights. A course is given to teachers to familiarize them with students' home environments. Included is a visit to every home, which helps to bridge the gap between school and community. The Neighborhood Service Center Program is the service core of the neighborhood where all levels of staff are available.

The new social work role which is emerging is a general one, providing all the many concrete needs and services for those in poverty.

ERIC No.	18. SOURCE OF ABSTRACT		
	C. FUNDING DATA		
	19. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION	20. DIVISION OR DEPT.	21. CONTRACT NO. / PROJECT NO.
		22. TOTAL COST OF PROJECT	
		23. DURATION OF PROJECT	U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Office of Education

ERIC Form 1

R37

THE UNIQUENESS OF FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION

WITH LOW INCOME PEOPLE*

Presented by:
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Services to Individuals and Families
Mobilization for Youth, Inc.

at the

4th Annual Leadership Institute in
Family Life Education, Nassau County
Mental Health Association

January 22, 1965

*Prepared with the assistance of Arlene Hannah.

ED001059

Since education is the principal means by which people achieve upward social mobility, the adequacy of the education experience made available to them cannot be minimized. When education is considered in its broadest sense--in relation to family life--we as professionals in the field of human behavior have fallen short of the mark for too long in relation to low-income people.

Evidence shows that low-income people, rooted in grinding poverty and discrimination, do not respond to conventional educational and casework techniques for a variety of reasons. Since their economic and social problems are both real and overwhelming, the need to concentrate on bare economic survival severely limits the amount of attention and energy that can be invested in the stimulation of intellectual growth and in "planning ahead." Moreover, low-income groups tend to view their problems as external, designed by a merciless fate which they cannot control. That they might solve their problems by taking a closer look at themselves, or by talking about them with an outsider, is seen by them as alien, impractical and ridiculous--and within the context of their reality, they are right.[1]

Thus, in hammering out a new technology to reach deprived families, Mobilization for Youth has taken the position that the poor cannot be reached without immediate, demonstrable, concrete action. This may

be considered the first step in the family life educational process in terms of engaging the poor.

The uniqueness of this process, having evolved from our knowledge of and experience with the life styles of our target population, might best be articulated by describing what is done programatically in MFY, using several representative units. The overall objective of the social work programs of MFY is to provide the inner city slum resident with a means of coping with the complexities of the urban industrial establishment. This may mean intervening with a public agency on behalf of a single client or helping slum residents organize into autonomous community action groups. In any case, the ability to affect one's own life chances militates against the anomie and alienation which is so widespread among this population group.[2]

The Parent Education Aide Program is a case in point. This unit, manned by a supervisor and 8 - 10 aides, has engaged in individual problem solving, group teaching and community action, as the situation required, and with an educational focus. Parent Aides try to help residents make home conditions such as to facilitate school achievement. This group has undertaken a number of tasks, including welcoming and orienting-in-migrants to urban living, facilitating parent-teacher interaction, organizing informal discussion groups and building meetings

and assisting in mass efforts to protest school conditions. One example of their endeavors is a mimeographed handbook to parents which describes in simplified terms the structure of the Board of Education, discusses the mutual responsibilities of schools and parents, and provides a comprehensive book list of Negro, Puerto Rican and Chinese culture. Another more generalized publication is Parent Educator, which discusses progress on the Lower East Side in relation to social action, lists a number of new Spanish organizations, provides a comprehensive directory of local community services and stresses the necessity of parental participation and involvement. These publications have been useful as springboards for discussion at regularly scheduled parent meetings.

The Parent Aides themselves are indigenous non-professionals, usually from the neighborhood. Our assumption is that not only can indigenous personnel establish contact with slum residents and maintain communication with them more easily than professionals, but also that they serve as effective role models for other residents, as well as having a particular expertise in coping with the life problems of the inner city.[3]

Our Visiting Homemaker Service is also manned by non-professionals, with a supervisor and caseworker as part of the team. Besides offering companionship and psychological support, and providing escort and mother's helper services, this unit has the added educational component

of teaching mothers increased competence in home management. This may involve budgeting, consumer education, and child development. In addition, homemakers teach the use of community resources (e.g., they may help client establish eligibility for public assistance or public housing). The focus in this program is on teaching by doing, and this kind of teaching "takes" with many of our clients, primarily because the homemaker is not so much different from them, and has learned successfully to negotiate the inner city. Therefore, our clients begin to perceive that it may also be possible for them.

In the School Community Relations Program, social workers serve as a liaison between the school and the community. Given the school as a middle class institution, low-income children come to the school ill-equipped to handle the requirements of such an institution. At home, the need to concentrate on monumental problems of daily living negates much investment in planning educational futures. Even given this investment, most parents have felt the school to be an awesome and impressing structure to which they are not really connected and of which they do not feel a part. The child therefore receives little support in his attempt to bridge these two adult worlds. The pivotal problem for the worker becomes one of minimizing the social distance between the school and the family in an effort to engage the youngster.

In individual cases, the crucial first step always involves meeting

concrete needs in terms of the client's priorities in concert with supportive techniques. After these needs are met, the next step with the family involves participation around planfully constructing effective ways of dealing with and negotiating the social systems involved. This may of course include DW, clinics, Housing Authority, etc., as well as the school system itself. We see this in large part as an educational process, whereby information about resources is provided, the client is helped to articulate his needs and rights, often through the use of role play, and he eventually begins to feel he has some power in relation to the world around him.

But the educational process is no one-way street. On the assumption that middle class teachers in a slum school are as ill equipped to deal with their students, as the students are to deal with the school, the School Community Relations Program has instituted a Home Visiting Course, in which teachers will visit the homes of all their pupils. This course is accompanied by a series of workshops and individual conferences designed to acquaint the teacher with pertinent data involving low income groups, including life style, ethnicity, cultural variables, etc. By making the teacher more aware of her pupil's environment, the course's aim is to help the teacher begin to shape the classroom milieu to meet the child's learning needs. In addition, the visits help the low income parent overcome the suspicion and fear he feels toward the school, which has now become a human being in the personna of "Miss Jones."

Hopefully, each begins to have a mutual respect and broadened perception of the other, with the result that the gap between school and the community begins to be bridged.[4]

The Neighborhood Service Center Program is probably the most broadly based in MFY, both in terms of problems encountered and the educational process that takes place. Viewed as helping stations, these centers are locally based, visible places to which people can go with their service needs and for information. "And once there, if the place is friendly and warm, low income persons, especially newcomers and those with language difficulty usually feel able to request immediate direct service and help with or information about many of their daily problems such as housing, education, public welfare, certain legal problems, consumer problems, and the like. "[5]

Manned by caseworkers and indigenous case aides, these centers function as a kind of social brokerage, making available a battery of skills and resources needed to deal with a broad range of problems. Often problems may be referred to another MFY program, such as the mental hygiene clinics, which are also undertaking newer techniques with low income groups, such as family centered treatment. Thus the centers may be viewed as clearing houses for all the resources of the community and of the MFY program.

"The service style which has emerged has been a mixture of supportive and environmental help in relation to the <u>effective</u> use of concrete services. This style includes immediate availability of staff to low

income persons; provisions of service in a warm, informal manner, meeting the large volume of service requests quickly and then discontinuing the service unless there is a return with another crisis. Thus the presenting problem is taken at face value and the crisis which seemed the most important to the family and which is considered needing fast attention is the staff focus.

"While this is not a new approach, there are discernible departures from the traditional approaches. There is great flexibility in service giving. Few structural demands are made and most significantly the traditional one-to-one worker client relationship is not considered basic to the provision of good services. Persons coming to the centers have 'caught' the flexibility oriented worker approach, and see the Center as the service core. This has been enhanced by the use of case aides as interpreters, as well as thorough use of all levels of staff as service givers or consultants. For example, supervisors, assistant chief, and chief, depending on the degree of expertness and experience in welfare, housing, etc., have been involved."[6]

Our view is that we can help the slum family cope with crises as they arise and when the presenting difficulty is resolved, the family will discontinue contact; as new problems arise, it will return for further service. As Purcell says in a recent paper, "This is not an unfamiliar

pattern; it is very like a return to the accountant each spring for aid in filling out income tax forms. This appraoch is not necessarily predicated on obtaining a 'cure', a family is not 'discharged' in the belief that it is no longer in need of service, for the problem -- poverty -- still exists."[7]

Thus, as the entire nation moves towards a solution to the problem of poverty, we see a new social work role emerging, that of the generalist. Teacher, mediator, abrasive, liaison, aribter, spokesman -- all these aspects are included in the new role, referred to by Dr. Cloward, MFY Research Director, as the "advocacy" role.[8] In the face of continuing highly centralized public bureaucracies, low income people are constantly faced with a disparity between their needs and the smooth functioning of the service-giving agencies. Given this premise, a spokesman is needed to articulate and underscore the client's rights in terms of the balance of power that exists in such relationships. As we move toward continued centralization of services, this will be an enduring problem and the advocacy role would seem to be an innovative, useful and enduring solution.

FOOTNOTES

1. Riessman, Frank and Hannah, Arlene, "The Poverty Movement," Columbia University Forum, Fall 1963.

2. Purcell, Francis P., "Action Programs in the War on Poverty", speech delivered at the Institute on Poverty, Psychology Department, State University, South Dakota, October 1964.

3. Brager, George, "The Low Income Non-Professional", speech delivered at National Conference on Social Welfare, Los Angeles, California, May 1964.

4. Hannah, Arlene, "Direct Help to the Child in School", speech delivered at CUSSW--MFY Poverty Institute, April 1964.

5. Shea, Margaret, "Helping Stations", speech delivered at UNH Conference, December 1964.

6. Ibid, p. 4.

7. Purcell, op. cit., p. 16.

8. Cloward, Dr. Richard, Talk delivered at SIF staff meeting, January 1965.

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